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DESTRUCTION OF DEER BY THE NORTHERN TIMBER WOLF.

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Timber wolves have become so numerous and destructive to game in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and in extreme northern Wisconsin and Minnesota as to threaten to exterminate the deer. By request of the sportsmen and some of the leading clubs of that region for assistance from the Biological Survey, I have lately visited several localities from which the complaints came to study actual conditions with a view to the discovery of means of protecting deer from the attacks of wolves.

Deer were found in considerable numbers in the swamps and dense timber, where, during the time of deep snow, they had gathered into well-beaten yards, often a hundred or more in a yard. Within the yards and along the trails food was abundant, and the deer would have wintered in good condition if unmolested, but while the snow was soft they were entirely at the mercy of the wolves.

Wolves were numerous, and dead deer were found in almost every yard visited, some partly eaten, others only torn and mangled. Large bucks, as well as does and fawns, had been killed, many more than could be eaten at the time. Only those killed since the last heavy fall of snow were visible, but in previous seasons hundreds of deer carcasses have been reported in the yards after the melting of the snow. When the snow becomes heavily crusted in spring the deer leave the yards and scatter over the country and are not easily caught. The wolves then return to the old carcasses, which probably furnish much of their food during the breeding season.

Up to the middle of April the wolves were not occupying their breeding dens. In this northern timbered region of cold weather and deep snow the breeding season appears to be a month later than in the milder valleys of Wyoming and the Rocky Mountains. The indications are that the pups in the dens should be looked for during May and the early part of June.

Many parts of this country are rough and rocky, with cut banks, steep slopes, and low cliffs which furnish ideal breeding places for wolves. Washed-out cavities in the sides of gulches, small caves in the sandstone cliffs bordering many of the stream valleys, and cavities

among boulders and broken rocks on the south slopes of high rocky ridges are common. Even during the early part of April the wolves, many of them in pairs, were paying frequent visits to such places, as shown by fresh tracks in many of the caves; and from the well-known breeding habits of wolves in other sections of the country it seems safe to assume that later these cavities are occupied as breeding dens. Many are located within easy reach of the deer yards, where a good supply of meat can be had during the spring. So much of the country is low or swampy that comparatively little effort would be necessary to a thorough search for dens over the warm slopes of all suitable breeding grounds. Every den should be located and the pups destroyed. By concerted effort on the part of residents and those interested in the protection of game the increase of wolves may thus be effectually checked. Once located, the dens should be visited each year in the breeding season, as wolves are known to use the same den successive years.

The fact is now well established that wolves do not breed until they are 2 years old, which accounts in part for the considerable number each spring that are not breeding. By the use of scents these usually can be trapped during spring and summer, though the best time for trapping is in fall and early winter.

For detailed instructions for trapping, poisoning, and locating dens, see Biological Survey Circular No. 55.

Approved:

JAMES WILSON,

Secretary of Agriculture.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *April 26, 1907.*

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